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ABSTRACT

A study examined 43 research projects conducted between FY89 and FY93 with funding under Section 353 of the Adult Education Act (AEA) grants and 4 additional research projects funded under other sections of the AEA. The project reports were collected by contacting each state literacy resource center, searching the ERIC system and a Division of Adult Education and Literacy guide to available 353 resources, and contacting individual contracting agencies directly. The purpose, methodology, and findings of each project for which a report was obtained were summarized in a brief, standard format. Similarities, correlations, and/or contradictions among the projects were identified. Most of the Section 353 projects were funded as demonstration projects delivering direct student services or staff development activities. Few projects had a true experimental design. The contact persons listed on each report were sent letters requesting information on follow-up activities and further developments since their projects' completion. Because only two responses were received, the follow-up portion of the study was abandoned. The project summaries were published in a 32-page booklet for distribution to interested adult educators through Pennsylvania's state literacy resource centers. (MN)

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ED 377 319

Research Distilled

FINAL REPORT

Research Distilled: Practical Summaries of Adult Education 353 Research Projects, 1989-93

An Adult Education Act, Section 353 Project
Fiscal Year 1993-94
Contract No. 99-4024, $12,000

New Educational Projects, Inc.
P.O. Box 182
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Tana Reiff
Project Director

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

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Table of Contents

Abstract 3
Introduction 4
The Project 5
Evaluation 8
Comments on Research
Under Section 353 9
Conclusions 12
Recommendations 16
Resources Cited 17

Abstract

Title:
Research Distilled: Practical Summaries of Adult Education 353 Research Projects, 1989-93

Project No. 99-4024 **Funding:** $12,000

Project Director: Tana Reiff **Phone Number:** (717) 299-8912

Contact Person: Same

Agency Address:
New Educational Projects, Inc.
P.O. Box 182
Lancaster, PA 17608-0182

Purpose: To provide, in an accessible format, information on research projects conducted under Section 353 grants.

Procedures: Searched available lists of Section 353 projects conducted nationwide; discerned those projects of a research nature; obtained final reports of those research projects; reviewed and summarized the reports; compiled a 32-page booklet of these summaries.

Summary of Findings: A total of 47 Adult Education Act projects were summarized: 43 conducted under Section 353 and four from other funding sources under the Act.

Comments: An unanticipated finding was that severe gaps in the 353 dissemination system exist, as observed in the process of trying to secure reports from states other than Pennsylvania. Also, significant weaknesses in project design were discovered in all but a few of the reports.

Product: A 32-page publication of research project summaries

Descriptors:

Introduction

Research Distilled: Practical Summaries of Adult Education 353 Research Projects, 1989-93 was a staff development project funded under Section 353 of the Adult Education Act to provide, in an accessible format, information on research projects conducted under Section 353 grants.

Toward that goal, *Research Distilled* pursued the following five objectives:

1. Collect reports of research projects conducted under Section 353 special-projects grants in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the United States since at least 1989.
2. Summarize the purpose, methodology employed, and findings of each relevant research project, in a brief, standard format.
3. Attempt to contact original researchers to learn what, if any, follow-up or subsequent developments have taken place since their projects were completed.
4. Cross-reference related research projects to identify similarities, correlations, and/or contradictions.
5. Produce 500 copies of a 32-page booklet of research-project summaries, for distribution through AdvancE to interested adult educators.

These activities were conducted between July 1, 1993, and June 30, 1994. Project Director was Tana Reiff. Dr. Robert Zellers of the University of Pittsburgh, Johnstown, provided an academic perspective by reviewing all of the summaries written by Ms. Reiff prior to publication. Cheryl Harmon of the AdvancE State Literacy Resource Center provided abundant, invaluable assistance in retrieving documents related to the project. Sincere gratitude is extended to her. In addition, several experts in adult education provided informal assistance, critiquing, and other advice during the course of the project.

The audience for this report and the publication produced by this project would be adult education practitioners and researchers involved in either a preliminary literature search or an overview of research conducted under Section 353 between 1989 and 1993.

Copies of this report as well as the project's publication, entitled *Research Distilled: Summaries of Adult Education Act Section 353 Research Projects, 1989-93,* are filed with the Pennsylvania State Literacy Resource Centers, Pennsylvania Department of Education. Copies of the publication are available to keep while the supply lasts. The addresses of the resource centers are as follows:

AdvancE
Pennsylvania Department of Education Resource Center
333 Market Street, 11th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333
(717) 783-9192
1-800-992-2283 (in PA)

Western Pennsylvania Adult Literacy Resource Center
5347 William Flynn Highway (Route 8)
Gibsonia, PA 15044
1-800-446-5607, ext. 216 (in PA)

The Project

The Research Distilled project was developed on the premise that no compilation of summaries of research projects conducted under Section 353 exists and that such a compilation would be useful to adult basic and literacy educators. Investigation of "research" reports also unintentionally revealed some disturbing discoveries about several key issues related to Section 353 projects and their dissemination.

It seemed appropriate that a survey of such projects be undertaken in Pennsylvania since this state appears to have the most research projects, if not the most 353 projects of all types, on file with the DAEL (Division of Adult Education and Literacy, U.S. Department of Education) and ERIC. (Iowa has spent more special-projects money on research, and its research projects are more comprehensive than Pennsylvania's.) However, the actual reason Research Distilled was conducted in Pennsylvania was that the idea was conceived here as a result of some discussion at a meeting of the FOCUS on Literacy panel. That FY1993 project was one of a series designed to disseminate information on exemplary special projects in Pennsylvania. One panel member commented that it might be useful to collect and summarize Section 353 research projects separately. Initially, the idea for *Research Distilled* was to collect and summarize such projects produced only in Pennsylvania. Later, the concept was broadened to include research projects from all states. As such, this should by rights have been a national project, but 353 funding is granted on a state-by-state basis.

Procedures for meeting each objective were as follows:

Objective 1. Collect reports of research projects conducted under Section 353 special-projects grants in Pennsylvania and elsewhere in the United States since at least 1989.

We began under the assumption that we would simply request a list of all Section 353 projects from the DAEL, then cull that list for projects classified as "research" and request copies of those projects' final reports. However, repeated requests to DAEL for a complete list of 353 projects were unproductive, though two staff members told us that such a list was available and promised to send it. As we later discovered, the most complete listing DAEL possesses is in fact only whatever states submit. Based on several telephone conversations with key DAEL personnel and the fact that the only listing we received was the DAEL publication, *A Guide to Special Demonstration and Teacher Training Projects: Special Answers for Special Needs* (July 1993), it finally became apparent that no comprehensive listing of all projects funded under Section 353 monies currently exists.

We concluded that if DAEL did not maintain a central list of special projects, then surely no one else would. We then proceeded to contact each State Literacy Resource Center directly. For about half the states, we had to contact State Adult Education Directors rather than Literacy Resource Center Directors because some resource centers were just being formed. We received only a few responses from our first mailing (with a letter signed by the former Director, Bureau of Adult Basic and Literacy Education, Pennsylvania Department of Education). We then learned secondhand that a discussion at a meeting of State Literacy Resource Directors had indicated that our request had been misunderstood to be for copies of *all* 353 projects. We subsequently sent a follow-up postcard to clarify and reinforce our request and received a few more responses, by phone and mail.

Nevertheless, from those two contacts with the State Literacy Resource Centers or State Directors of Adult Education (three separate contacts for Florida and Texas), we received responses from only 13 states: Alabama, Arizona, Florida, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Montana, North Carolina, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, and West Virginia. Several of

these states courteously responded as per our requests despite having produced no true research projects.

Some of the few states from which we received responses did not have, or were unable to locate, central listings of funded 353 projects within their own states. A few states were able to supply brief abstracts of only the current or the past two years' projects and were unable to access any earlier listings. This dearth of record keeping was perhaps even more disturbing than the fact that no central listing existed at the federal level. Of those states that did maintain comprehensive lists of 353 projects, none besides Pennsylvania classified projects according to type, such as demonstration or research. Listings were not in any sort of standard format, either from year to year within a state or in comparison to other states.

Florida's projects were exceptionally easy to access. Tucked into the booklet of current-year project abstracts was a reader service card on which projects could be requested based on assigned numbers. This project utilized that card to request final reports and received two as a result (though only one was appropriate for review).

Of those states which did not respond, we presumed the following reasons: 1) our correspondence never reached the appropriate person, 2) the state literacy resource center was not yet in place, 3) the state had no record of 353 projects, or 4) the state had no research projects conducted under Section 353 and so ignored our request.

Based on the listings received from the states, we requested copies of final reports of all projects that appeared to have a research orientation based on the abstracts. Of those received, all projects which met our criteria (see below) were reviewed and profiled in the *Research Distilled* publication.

In summary, we located research projects conducted under Section 353 of the Adult Education Act through the following means: 1) various publications produced by AdvancE, Pennsylvania's state literacy resource center; 2) several ERIC listings or other references to ERIC document numbers; 3) *Special Answers for Special Needs: A Guide to Available 353 Resources* (July 1993), from the U.S. Department of Education, Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) Clearinghouse; 4) at least two contacts to every state literacy resource center; and 5) correspondence directly to individual contracting agencies. We maximized use of our own State Literacy Resource Center, as Cheryl Harmon of AdvancE fulfilled our numerous, scattered requests for original documents and ERIC microfiche. Overall, our search was conscientious but far from systematic.

We included additional projects funded under Section 383 (evaluation projects funded directly by the U.S. Department of Education through the Research Information Network), on the basis of information published in the DAEL Clearinghouse's *Resource Update*. Although that publication told little about each project (only name and contractor, sometimes not even the date or funding source), it did provide a separate classification for research projects. We located several Section 353 research projects in *Resource Update*, however, that were not classified as such. Some projects are classified incorrectly altogether. As an example, the "Document Type" for a project produced by New Educational Projects was incorrectly listed as "Classroom Material." In light of such misclassifications, we pored through lists of all project descriptions to try to discern from brief abstracts and sometimes from only titles whether a project was in any way research oriented. This subjective search may have overlooked some projects that should have been included in our compilation.

We also found several listings of research projects which, even though contained in 1993 listings, were too old for this project — as far back as 1983 — so did not pursue them. (One exception was "Strategies for Success: A Study in ABE Student Retention," which we included because of its correlations to several other later retention studies.)

Also, some final reports from 1989-93 were already out of print or reported through direct contact with their sources to be "unavailable." Conversely, some FY1993 projects were too

recent to have yet entered the document stream.

After obtaining as many final reports as possible, we began reading. Some of the reports were clearly formatted according to standard research-reporting protocol. In some cases, even some well-written reports, it was impossible to discern whether a study had been conducted on solid ground, that is whether procedures were clearly planned and carried out, even whether the premise was sound. However, from some reports, these factors were obvious, and in several, the report writers were candid in pointing out the study's weaknesses.

Objective 2. Summarize the purpose, methodology employed, and findings of each relevant research project, in a brief, standard format.

Objective 3. Attempt to contact original researchers to learn what, if any, follow-up or subsequent developments have taken place since their projects were completed.

Objective 4. Cross-reference related research projects to identify similarities, correlations, and/or contradictions.

From the lists and reports which we studied, we observed that most 353 projects were funded as demonstration (or pilot) projects delivering direct student services, or as staff-development projects, such as training workshops. Many projects produced curriculum and staff-development materials, as part of a demonstration or not. Only a small number of 353 projects had a true experimental design. Some, even if they appeared to have been designed as research projects, did not follow standard research procedure; sometimes, even some of the project objectives strayed from the central purpose.

We applied the following criteria for including projects in the publication of summaries:

a. The project was funded under the Adult Education Act, Section 353 or Section 383, between FY1989 and FY1993.
b. The project's final report could be located and reviewed firsthand.
c. The project fit the criteria of a research project in some way: a controlled study, collection and analysis of data, evaluation based on set criteria, etc. Only firsthand research projects were included, not literature surveys.
d. The project's findings were deemed worthy of reporting for any reason: they were exemplary, had broad-based applicability, or had a valid premise not fully realized which other researchers could refine and develop in related future studies.

The format for writing reviews of the reports was as follows: Title, Project Number (if there was one), Date (fiscal year), State, Contractor, Purpose, Procedure (summarized), Summary of Findings, Comments (subjective), Correlations/Cross-References (to other projects or studies, to best of our knowledge with limited research), Contact Information, and For Copy of Full Report (where to obtain).

After reviewing final reports, we wrote a letter requesting follow-up information and updated contact information, whenever feasible, to the contact persons listed on the reports. That we received only tworesponses to these letters suggests that some contact people may no longer be at the institutions listed; however, none of our letters was returned by the U.S. Postal Service as undeliverable. Because we received so little usable information in the first wave of follow-up letters, which was a time-consuming procedure, we did not pursue the remainder as planned.

Objective 5. Produce 500 copies of a 32-page booklet of research-project summaries, for distribution through [Pennsylvania's State Literacy Resource Centers] to interested adult educators.

Considerable effort went into designing, formatting, and producing the project's 32-page booklet of summaries. A new price quotation for the printing job allowed us to print 600 copies instead of 500, and to have a two-color cover. As is the policy of New Educational Projects, Inc., the booklet was printed on recycled paper.

Copies were then delivered to AdvancE in Harrisburg and disseminated to the Western Pennsylvania Literacy Resource Center, nine regional staff development centers throughout the state, and individuals requesting copies.

Availability of the publication was publicized in *What's the Buzz!*, Pennsylvania's Adult Basic and Literacy Education Newsletter, and through Cheryl Harmon and Chris Kemp, the literacy resource center directors. In addition, 114 individual copies were mailed from New Educational Projects to each contractor whose project was reviewed and to other key contacts with a potential interest in the topic.

Evaluation

A survey card was tucked into the first 500 copies of *Research Distilled* (copy attached). However, only eight cards were received as of August 3, 1994. Three were postmarked from Pennsylvania; the remainder were from Illinois, New Jersey, Kentucky, Ohio, and Oklahoma. Responses were as follows:

- Average ratings of the publication on a scale of 0 to 5, with 5 being the most favorable rating:

  Organization of material covered: 4.75 (7/8 responses were 5)
  Writing quality of material: 4.875 (7/8 responses were 5)
  Presentation/graphic appeal: 4.625 (5/8 responses were 5; one commented "Excellent" beside rating of 5)
  Potential as an aid to literature search: 4.75 (7/8 responses were 5)
  Value as adult education reference source: 4.875 (7/8 responses were 5; one added + to rating of 5)

  (NOTE: 4 of the 8 respondents rated every item "5.")

  Other:

  "Documentation of failure to require dissemination of project results through dissemination systems: 5"
  "Like complete contact names/for future reference: 5"
  "Value to me: 5"

- Respondents' reasons for having obtained a copy of *Research Distilled:*

  "Reference source and duplications avoidance"
  "Regional Staff Dev. Ctr. (Obtained to share w/others)"
  "Information Update"
  "Personal use"
  "As part of my ERIC work"
  "New Jersey Literacy Resource Center - Trenton"
  "I was sent a copy because one of our projects was listed."

- Other comments:

  "Good job!"

"I would like to see this approach done w/PA's 353's each year."

"So often, projects seem to 'just be' after completion of funding year. I was excited to be critiqued, validated as a pro! Thanks!"

"Very useful. 'Comments' sections informative."

"Tana - This publication is great. It is a testimony to the difficulty of locating these materials because of lack of requirements to disseminate. I think the write ups on projects are excellent + provide very helpful evaluation comments - My only difficulty was in understanding how you were using the word 'experimental' in the intro. At first I thought it meant you were limiting to experimental (quantitative) research. Thanks for sending this to me. Susan Imel [Director and Adult Education Specialist, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education]"

"Very useful categories for listing of projects."

Also, in the consultant's last review of the product, Dr. Zellers wrote to the Project Director:

"Your final product is very attractive and scholarly. You did a beautiful job of formatting the information. I can tell that this project was far more than you originally planned ... I wish you well and encouragement in future 353 projects. You have consistently produced the highest quality products in this funding area of adult education and I hope you continue ..."

Comments on Research Under Section 353

Because the procedures of this project revealed a number of realizations regarding Section 353 projects and their dissemination, we herewith provide additional comments, based on the research conducted by this project, much of which far exceed the original scope of the project's objectives.

By way of introduction, Section 353 of the Adult Education Act (Public Law 100-297) mandates that not less than 15% of federal Adult Education Act funds allotted to a state each year be used for Special Demonstration Projects and Teacher Training. Two-thirds of the 15% must be used for teacher-training (staff-development) projects.

This funding area has been controversial since the 1960s when it was initiated, and throughout its history in 353's predecessors, the related Sections 309 and 310. There are many reasons for the controversy, outlined well in both *The Adult Education Act: A Guide to the Literature and Funded Projects* (Leahy) and *Ends or Means: An Overview of the History of the Adult Education Act* (Rose). Lack of clear guidelines and standards, along with poor dissemination, have plagued this integral opportunity to develop adult education in the field.

The original Section 309 of the Adult Education Act of 1966 was "not for basic research but rather for demonstration projects and 'other applied research activities' " (Rose). In fact, few of these so-called applied research activities have ever employed any research design whatsoever in their special projects.

We did locate a Section 310 research project from FY1981, in which Michael A. Ciavarella at Shippensburg State College (now Shippensburg University) in Pennsylvania developed "A Comparison of Community Linkage and Outreach Models for Maximizing Adult Basic Education." That study surveyed a variety of ABE programs to discover, comparatively, how they were interacting with the general public, particularly through advisory councils and public-awareness activities. The project is not reviewed here because of its early date; it is mentioned to illustrate the existence of projects funded under adult education special-projects grants that

did employ applied research methodology.

In fact, experimental design of projects is implicit in the Adult Education Act. The *Federal Register* of October 28, 1991, describes the Adult Education State Plan required for submission by each State Education Agency (SEA) applying for an Adult Education Act basic grant. Not less than 15% of the grant is to be used for "special experimental demonstration projects and teacher training projects." Although each state may establish its own criteria and priorities for administering special projects, and two-thirds of the 15% must be reserved for training personnel, the word *experimental* in reference to demonstration projects clearly implies encouragement of the use of experimental methodology. (The *Federal Register* provides no further detail on how the money is to be spent.)

Unlike many states, Pennsylvania's 353 Projects Request for Proposal explicitly lists Research under types of "Special experimental demonstration proposals designed for regional or statewide impact":

"2. Research. Proposals in this area should involve the collection and analysis of adult basic education data and subsequent recommendations for action."

Within this category lies the possibility for conducting research, evaluating or surveying a situation or population related to adult basic and literacy education, or designing a demonstration project using established research design principles, that is to test a hypothesis. Standard procedure for accomplishing this in an academic setting would be to compare a control group and an experimental group, or to produce some form of new data. These outcomes have rarely occurred in projects of any nature conducted with Section 353 funding.

Also falling within Section 353 is Teacher Training, and within that area falls "action research." This rather new approach provides a good way to answer practical questions in a real situation.

Through its review of K-12 literature, the *Study of ABE/ESL Instructor Training Approaches* identified action research, or practitioner-as-researcher, as "an effective staff development technique. Through action research, teachers identify the questions that interest them and plan for and conduct systematic inquiry in their own teaching environments as they work with their students. In conducting this research, they keep careful records on the progress of learners. The information and insights gathered through this process are used by teacher-researchers to improve their own practice and/or to share with others."

The Statewide Adult Basic Education System (SABES) in Massachusetts follows a systematic six-step process for organizing action research projects:

1. Learn how to look at the classroom. This might include keeping a journal or discussing issues with other practitioners to identify researchable problems and exploring possible interventions.
2. Form a research question. The question should be interesting, focused, and finite enough to be answered within the constraints of the practitioner's time and resources.
3. Create a research design. The research must utilize quantitative and/or qualitative methods.
4. Collect data. Collection methods include keeping records, surveying published research, collecting students' writing, and administering tests.
5. Analyze data. This could be in the form of a summary, graph, or chart.
6. Share results. This might be informally, with students or other teachers, or formally, in a report or a presentation at staff-development workshops.

Or, as summarized by Quigley (1994), "Action research ... has four distinct steps: 1) Plan, 2) Act, 3) Observe, 4) Reflect." This cycle can then be repeated "to test new insights and systematically observe and document how each new insight affects our practice."

A similar procedure may be followed by a "study circle," in which a group of teachers collaborate to conduct the action research and meet regularly to share discoveries and tech-

niques and discuss ways to improve both their teaching practice and their staff-development program.

All of these related procedures employ an experimental design, even if the research is qualitative in nature.

Research Distilled located several projects conducted by the Virginia Adult Educators Research Network, which is funded under Section 353 to provide a system for coordinating action research. The Network appears to be a model of adult education action research in that, though cooperative, coordinated efforts, research findings can be applied more generally than would be possible in isolated research efforts involving sample sizes too small to be broadly valid. We were impressed with the work of this Network, through telephone conversations with its director, Suzanne Cockley, and through reading the materials it produces, notably a guide to action research that would be useful in virtually any adult education environment.

In Pennsylvania, small grants to conduct teacher action research are currently available through the state's nine regional staff-development centers. In addition, an outlet for publishing findings exists in *The PAACE Journal of Lifelong Learning*, the publication of the Pennsylvania Association for Adult Continuing Education. Teachers are encouraged to contact the coordinator or their regional center for further information on action research grants.

What do those who have conducted research under Section 353 have to say regarding the use of Section 353 funding for research projects? Our follow-up letter to project directors asked for comments. Herewith selected responses:

From Dr. Meryl K. Lazar, University of Pittsburgh:

"The limit of one funding year puts serious constraints on our ability to make any kind of impact. It takes most of the year to develop the instrumentation we hope to study and then we are left with little time for implementation and follow-up. Too often it takes instructors the entire year to feel comfortable with us and the procedures we are asking them to integrate into their classroom routines and then the grant ends. Therefore, longterm effects are probably negligible. A two-year funding cycle would be great or some kind of renewable option in which funding could be renegotiated for a 3-5 year period. We could really accomplish something then!

"Another area which we would like to see addressed is for 353 grant monies to be used for more pure research. Funding is generally earmarked for [demonstration] projects rather than research. To fully understand the types of programming which are effective, some controlled studies need to be conducted so that variables of effective instruction can be identified. Once we better understand what works, we can then make data-based recommendations on instructional programming which will be effective."

From David W. Fluke, Adult Education Linkage Services, Troy, PA:

"It is certainly feasible and, we feel, appropriate to conduct research projects under Section 353 grants. However, as with so many 353 projects, nearly all of these research studies produce no follow-through ... We feel the answer to this is to fund research projects for two years (this is permitted under federal Section 353 guidelines) with the initial year being the research/data gathering activity and the second year the follow-up, clarification, activity-generating year."

Conclusions

The publication produced by this project contains the specific conclusions drawn as a result of having reviewed 47 Adult Education Act research projects.

In addition, the scope of this project expanded considerably as we realized the difficulty of systematically locating final reports of research conducted under Section 353, the special-projects section of the Adult Education Act. Further, reading a significant number of 353 final reports (having read many others in the past as well) illuminated common flaws in project design. Many of 353's problems are under study at state and federal levels, and in some cases solutions may be in the works. Based only on the experience and somewhat incidental research of this project, however, we here relate our observations and conclusions regarding the issues of project design and dissemination as of mid-1994.

Project Design. Few special demonstration projects were found to be research oriented, that is offering a control against which the effectiveness of experimentation can be compared and evaluated. This can be viewed as a definitional shortcoming of most "special demonstration" projects in actual practice.

Typical of this flaw was a 1993 Tennessee project which developed an elaborate fiber-optic-based interactive telecommunications network for ABE in five counties. The project reported gains in reading and math scores of adult students enrolled in the computer-based program without any comparison to scores achieved through a traditional delivery system, because a control group did not exist. The program may indeed have been successful, but that conclusion cannot be definitively drawn in the absence of comparative data.

Demonstration projects also often evaluate the innovative curriculathey have produced with only post-measurement. For example, a project in New York developed detailed objectives and curricula and conducted an extensive evaluation of a contextualized vocational education program. However, post-program questions such as "Students exhibit greater knowledge in the world of work" not only ask for comparisons in the absence of pre-program data but also are quite broad and subjective.

Well-intended demonstration projects such as these that offer no valid quantitative or qualitative data were numerous and were not summarized in the *Research Distilled* publication because they did not fit our definition of a research project. Demonstration projects offering proof that the effort was successful would be much more useful for everyone's purposes.

In addition, in our preliminary review of project abstracts, we were struck by fact that so many staff workshops funded under Section 353 are presented with objectives such as "To train teachers, coordinators and recruiters in strategies that will increase student retention and goal attainment." Such a statement assumes that the training is a dissemination of research-supported strategies. But almost never was this actually the case. Not only is research under Section 353 scant, but many contractors are developing staff-development and special-demonstration projects with no discernible experimental or research design. It is not enough to report a project as "successful" or results as "positive." Projects producing print materials probably have less obligation to use a research model.

The Adult Education Act of 1966 funded experimental and demonstration projects for the first time through its Section 309b, the precursor to Section 353. In 1969, General Electric Company evaluated the first few years of this new funding and concluded that some useful results were indeed emerging. The GE report added, however, that (quoting Leahy) "the projects could be more successful and the outcomes improved if solid, better guidelines were established, if assistance and advice were available, especially in the early stages, and if consultation were provided for directors who had not had previous experience with such projects. The

report also suggested more careful monitoring, training in report writing, and guidelines for dissemination and replication. It recommended that the advantages of implementing the innovations in ongoing programs across the country should be tested and demonstrated."

Today, some 25 years later, the same conclusions could be drawn with regard to most Section 353 projects and to research projects conducted under Section 353 in particular. Much work remains to be done to assure higher quality of Section 353 projects.

A trilogy of documents addressing special-projects evaluation was developed in New York state. In *A Source Book for Evaluation Special Projects* (1988), the authors list types of projects conducted under Section 310 (now 353). For demonstration projects, they describe a variety of formal evaluation designs; first on the list is "controlled studies using random assignment or quasi-experimental designs." Other methods include pre-post outcome measures, follow-up investigations, and analysis of data across demonstration sites.

Later in that report, selected research designs for student impact evaluations are detailed. The authors cite the limitations of conducting pre- and post-testing within only one group; instead, they recommend the use of the nonequivalent control method, which employs comparison groups of students who are or are not using the project's program design. At the very least, performance of a program group can be compared to norms instead of to a comparison group, if norms are available. The report also briefly describes how to select students and randomly place them into groups to increase the chances of valid results. A variety of model evaluation instruments is provided in the appendices.

The purpose of demonstration projects, says the New York report, is to *demonstrate* whether or not a project is worthy of replication elsewhere in the state or of statewide adoption. "These projects are of greatest value ... when they include a formal evaluation of their effectiveness and efficiency." This determination can be made only through sound project design. And at the heart of sound project design are measurable objectives: objectives that provide a comparison against which success can be measured.

Section 353 projects, in Pennsylvania at least, are subjected to strict financial scrutiny, as strict as instructional programs are. Budget sheets are meticulously examined by at least three offices within the state Department of Education, and are required to comply, in every line and column, with rigid guidelines. Audits demand documentation for every purchase, even those for as little as one dollar. Frequent financial reports must be filed punctually or funds are withheld. Some of these administrative exercises cost inordinate time and stress in the name of accountability. Why, then, should not the design and content of our special projects be subjected to comparable standards of quality?

Project Dissemination. Further complicating matters is the uncoordinated dissemination system to which 353 projects have had access.

A 1973 study of adult basic education teacher training under Section 353 (Spear et al.) drew a conclusion that could also readily apply to Section 353 today: "Its literature is scattered; its records imprecise or missing altogether; its costs uncalculated; its students and teachers uncounted and unknown; its objectives obscure; and its organization adrift."

In 1979 the National Conference of Adult Education State Directors examined the problem of special-projects reporting and dissemination. This group's conclusions (again from Leahy) were:

1. Some reports, occasionally excellent ones much needed by the profession, are not reaching the dissemination systems.
2. Most reports are not properly designed to accommodate the reproduction requirements for dissemination and information retrieval systems; hence, their utility is limited.
3. Many reports are not reaching the practitioners. Significant reports in some cases are not disseminated within a state although the State Education Agency is the grantor. Conse-

quently, useful ideas lose their adoptive impact because users and decision makers are not informed.

4. Many [special-projects] reports are incomplete and this diminishes their usefulness.

Indeed, evaluation, outcomes, and transferability were not even required components of projects funded under Section 309/310. New projects seeking to replicate or validate earlier projects need to be aware of what others have done. In our search we noted many similar projects done in several states, suggesting that grantees either did not (or could not) search the literature (as is requested in funding guidelines) or could have adapted another project rather than duplicate efforts by pursuing the same basic objective from the ground up.

An ongoing examination of special projects in Pennsylvania, called FOCUS on ... (various categories such as curriculum, literacy, program management, etc.), conducted by Sherry Royce and funded under Section 310/353, began in 1985. The FOCUS projects, which continue even now, assemble a panel of adult education practitioners to evaluate all 353 projects produced in Pennsylvania. Bulletin are then produced describing the "exemplary" projects. This effort has gone a long way toward dissemination of successful 353 projects in this one state; however, by virtue of FOCUS's emphasis on exemplary projects, any funded project that didn't make the cut was likely to languish in obscurity nonetheless.

On the other hand, despite its efforts to the contrary, the databases of special-project reports maintained by ERIC and U.S. Department of Education's Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) Clearinghouse represent neither a complete nor an exclusively "exemplary" listing of projects. In reality, the basic criterion for inclusion is that an individual contractor or a state made the effort to submit the project. Though DAEL claims that: "Based on established criteria, innovative and potentially adaptable projects are selected" and we speculate that some screening often takes place at a lower level (such as within a state), the task of judging project quality is limited by the actual pool of projects submitted.

Then, too, in any dissemination effort which seeks to publicize "exemplary" work, research projects often have not risen to the top of the heap, for various reasons. Often, as *Research Distilled* illustrates, a research project is indeed not exemplary: its methods, even its premise, may be flawed, or its outcomes may be incomplete or inconclusive. On the other hand, the best-designed research project simply may not be as attention-getting as its demonstration-project competition. The result is that many research projects tend not to be disseminated—this in the face of poor dissemination in general.

Moreover, many 353 projects were never duly recorded as ever having occurred. A February 26, 1992, memo to State Directors of Adult Education from Dr. Joan Seamon, then DAEL Director, expressed the U.S. Department of Education's desire to see all Section 353 project summaries: "Please send one copy of the final report and any related products to use within 90 days after the close of the project. We are presently establishing a database of 353 projects that will be an invaluable resource in improving the dissemination of information about special projects ... Our publication, *Special Answers for Special Needs: A Guide to Available 353 Resources*, is a selected listing of projects based on your reports that are reviewed by specialists on our staff."

Seamon's request was fundamental but it was not a mandate, and so apparently, at the time of publication of *Special Answers*, some states still were not submitting *any* Section 353 project reports while others were not submitting *all* of their 353 project reports. Many states still apparently were not submitting even full *lists* of funded 353 projects to the DAEL, not to mention abstracts, summaries, or final reports.

Evidence of this discrepancy is an analysis of the contents of the 1993 edition of the DAEL's *A Guide to Special Demonstration and Teacher Training Projects: Special Answers for Special Needs*, which lists Section 353 projects covering four or five years. If indeed that publication is a compilation of *exemplary* projects drawn from a complete collection of final

reports, then the following statistical analysis is invalid. (Indeed, several of the lists this project received from states contained projects not included in *Special Answers.*) If *Special Answers* is in fact a list of only and all the projects submitted to DAEL, then our observations bear out significant omissions. Of the 207 projects summarized in that publication, 59, or 28%, are from Pennsylvania. This is presumably due to the fact that Pennsylvania tends to fund numerous smaller projects rather than a few larger projects, as many other states do. However, this disproportionate number of projects from one state, along with the fact that only 28 states and the District of Columbia are represented in the publication, implies that not all states are submitting their 353 projects to the DAEL. (Three listed projects indicated no state of origin.) Moreover, the fact that several states are represented by only one or two projects suggests that some states either are not submitting all their projects, are conducting very few projects, or are producing very few exemplary projects. In any case, weaknesses are apparent.

Further, document retrieval sources are inconsistent. Copies of 353 projects listed in *Special Answers* are available from the DAEL Clearinghouse, ERIC, ERIC Document Reproduction Service, or the original producers themselves. Costs range from no charge to $50 and more. Not every title represented in *Special Answers* is available from DAEL. Two titles requested from DAEL just five months after release of *Special Answers* were already unavailable.

Weaknesses also appeared as we attempted to retrieve 353 documents from individual states. Pennsylvania's literacy resource system showed itself to be a model of 353 storage and retrieval efficiency. Virtually any project report ever produced in this state is available on loan. The few that are not are those that were never microfiched and whose limited copies were never returned by borrowers. On the other end of the spectrum, many states, even those that do keep a central listing of 353 projects, do not maintain a library of their own state's final reports, though most states appear to be in the process of initiating one. This change comes as a result of the National Literacy Act of 1991, which amended the Adult Education Act to include the State Literacy Resource Center Program, a mandate for the operation of a literacy clearinghouse for each state (with some states combined into one regional center).

Also, under Section 384 of the Adult Education Act, the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) was formed as an interagency agreement among the Secretaries of Education, Health and Human Services, and Labor. The NIFL is designed to support basic and applied research; program assistance, technical assistance, and training; policy analysis and evaluation; dissemination of information about best practices of instruction; and assistance to federal agencies in implementing the Adult Education Act and finding ways to achieve uniform reporting requirements, develop performance measures, and develop standards of program effectiveness. The NIFL is also charged with serving, through various communication methods, as a link among State Literacy Resource Centers.

Although at this writing many of the new State Literacy Resource Centers are just getting started and/or are grossly underfunded (due in part to the required state match; e.g., a reported paltry $8,000 for the entire FY1994 in Montana), the new push for better coordination and dissemination of resources should eventually produce better documentation of 353 projects.

In the meantime, researchers have no choice but to gather information on Section 353 projects from disparate sources, never knowing definitively if what has been collected is complete. Certainly, it is not, but it may also be presumed that any 353 research project that has not been located through the exhaustive methods employed by the Research Distilled project is simply not currently accessible or available.

Recommendations

Having perhaps presumptuously far extended the scope of this project, we nevertheless offer the following recommendations for Section 353:

1. **All Adult Education Act research and demonstration projects, including basic data collection and analysis, should be required to follow experimental methodology, even if at a simplified level.** This would help produce true "best practices" and findings that could be validated or replicated elsewhere. Evaluation criteria should be integrated in state- or nationwide special-projects guidelines. Better project design, reporting, and dissemination in general would facilitate replication and further validation by other programs with similar needs.

2. **Final reports of Section 353 projects should follow a standard format.** In Pennsylvania, project producers are given a basic set of requirements and most contractors follow it to varying degrees; however, those who do not supply even the basic requirements are not asked to resubmit their reports. The result of a lack of final report standards— in any state—is that reports may: a) result in projects' being reviewed unfavorably or as less than exemplary, so that they never show up at DAEL or ERIC, or even in state bulletins; b) be difficult to read and draw conclusions from; c) conceal a flawed project design; d) fail to fully report on the project conducted; or e) provide inadequate accountability due to weak evaluation components.

3. **Dissemination of Section 353 projects needs to be systematized and broadened.** The U.S. Department of Education should *require* abstracts of *all* 353 projects as a part of fulfilling Adult Education State Plans, and all submissions should be classified according the categories established by the DAEL Clearinghouse. A copy of every final report should go directly to DAEL. At the very least, a list of each state's Section 353 projects would provide DAEL the opportunity to request a copy of any report it is particularly interested in seeing. Having actual final reports, each on microfiche as well, would ensure that no projects ever disappear into oblivion in case anything happens to them at the state level (though states should institute similar precautions). In addition, every granted proposal should document awareness of related projects completed in other states—information available only through a central listing. In addition, there needs to be a way to easily retrieve *any* funded 353 project's final report, preferably from one central source. Exemplary projects could be forwarded to ERIC for distribution beyond the Adult Education Act community. Within each state, too, methods for storaging and retrieving 353 project documents need to be improved.

4. **A special-projects section of the Adult Education Act should be continued, refined, and even expanded, as it holds great potential for development of the adult education field if its projects are designed, funded, carried out, and disseminated properly.**

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